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"Monitoring Compliance"

The negotiation of limitations on strategic arms is highly desirable, if a start ever is to be made on disarmament in the world. But along with those limitations there must be effective protection against cheating by a would-be aggressor state.

The director of the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States, Richard Helms, made that clear in an unusual address to the American Society of Newspaper Editors in Washington this week. The speech was unusual since the CIA and its director seldom appear in public. It was his first public address since 1967.

The head of the supersecret espionage agency called it "unthinkable to conclude a strategic arms limitation agreement with the Soviet Union without the means for monitoring compliance." His position is sound. Failure to confirm compliance on arms limitations would be an invitation to national disaster. Throughout the centuries there have been men and nations which have been bent on conquest of the world. Too many have tried it, with horrifying results for humanity. The temptation should not be placed before the eyes of any country, large or small.

Monitoring, either by multi-nation representatives of the United Nations, or some other international arrangement, will delay final agreement. The Soviet Union jealously guards its secrets and has insisted in nuclear limitation attempts that on-site inspection was a cleverly devised scheme to allow the United States to spy on it. Until such suspicion can be put aside, effective limitations on arms will be impossible. But high as is the hurdle of monitoring the results of clearing it will be worth the effort.